



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

**Department of Education
& Early Development**

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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August 16, 2016

Dear Tribal Leader,

In December 2015, President Obama signed the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaces No Child Left Behind. The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) is committed to implementing the requirements of ESSA in a way that reflects our state's unique educational context and a common vision for education held by Alaskan parents, educators, community members, and policymakers.

Our goal is to meaningfully support all of the state's schools and students, whether in our largest urban population centers or our smallest rural communities. DEED, with significant stakeholder engagement from Alaskans, will draft and submit a state plan to the U.S. Department of Education to meet this goal and comply with ESSA. I am reaching out to invite participation by you and other tribal members over the next year as we craft an education plan that works for all of Alaska's 133,000 public school students.

Why is tribal engagement important?

Engagement between State agencies and your tribe is important because it is paramount that we seek your input and perspective as one out of every five public school students in our state is Alaska Native or American Indian. It is also noteworthy to share that:

- During the 2015-2016 school year, half of the school districts in the state enrolled a majority Alaska Native/American Indian student population.
- In 53 schools, 100 percent of the student population was Alaska Native or American Indian.
- Unlike most states, an indigenous language is the most common language spoken by Alaska's English Learners.

All of Alaska's students deserve the benefit of your input.

What are the tribal engagement opportunities?

There will be multiple opportunities for tribal leaders to engage with DEED over the next year. I hope you will provide input on the key state plan content areas of standards and assessment, school accountability, and school improvement and support as options are developed. There will be official periods of public comment after DEED has completed a full draft of the state plan

and when the State Board of Education considers regulations to implement the plan. Department staff will also be available to present and solicit feedback at conferences and meetings, such as the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention and the BIA Tribal Providers Conference.

Who should tribes contact?

The primary contact person throughout the ESSA development process is Dr. Susan McCauley. Based in Palmer, Dr. McCauley is DEED's Education Policy Coordinator. In her role, she is coordinating our overall ESSA engagement and communication work, including tribal consultation. Dr. McCauley is also available for one-on-one conversations to address your tribe's specific questions or concerns. She can be reached at susan.mccauley@alaska.gov or (907) 419-3745.

Also, please note that DEED now has a designated tribal liaison who meets with counterparts in other State agencies to foster communication and collaboration with our state's tribes. DEED's engagement with you and other tribal leaders demonstrates our respect for you and our commitment to your students. DEED's tribal liaison is Brian Laurent. He can be reached at brian.laurent@alaska.gov or (907) 465-8418.

I look forward to working with you as we develop a state plan for education that considers the needs of all Alaskan students. Your input and counsel during the ESSA development process will be meaningful for Alaska's future. Dr. McCauley will communicate with you when specific engagement opportunities become available. In the meantime, please contact her, Brian or me with any questions regarding ESSA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Johnson", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr. Michael Johnson
Commissioner